

Message Text

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SUBJ: REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT AMIR IBRAHIM NASIR, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES SINCE 1968, ANNOUNCED TO THE CITIZENS'
MAJLIS ON JUNE 12, 1978 HIS DECISION TO DECLINE NOMINATION
FOR A THIRD FIVE YEAR TERM. NASIR HAS HEALTH PROBLEM, BUT
MAY BE INDUCED TO SERVE AGAIN. END SUMMARY.

2. ELECTION MECHANICS
THE ELECTION PROCESS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES BEGINS WITH
A MEETING OF THE CITIZENS' MAJLIS WHERE A NEW PRESIDENT IS
NOMINATED BY SECRET BALLOT. THE NOMINEE IS THEN INFORMED OF
THE DECISION OF THE MAJLIS AND EITHER ACCEPTS OR DECLINES THE
NOMINATION. IF THE NOMINEE ACCEPTS, HIS NAME IS PUT TO A
PUBLIC VOTE AND HE IS ELECTED IF HE RECEIVES A MAJORITY.
IF THE NOMINEE DECLINES, THE MAJLIS MEETS IN A SPECIAL SESSION
AND NOMINATES ANOTHER PERSON.

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3. NASIR DECLINES
ON JUNE 12, 1978, AFTER HAVING BEEN INFORMED OF THE DECISION
OF THE MAJLIS TO NOMINATE HIM FOR A THIRD TERM (THE VOTE OF
THE MAJLIS WAS FORTY-ONE FOR AND FIVE AGAINST), PRESIDENT
NASIR DECLINED THE NOMINATION IN A LETTER DETAILING HIS GOVERN-
MENT SERVICE WHICH BEGAN IN 1949. HE THANKED THE MAJLIS FOR
THE VOTE OF CONFIDENC, BUT CITED ILL HEALTH AND "OTHER REA-

SONS" WHICH PREVENTED HIM FROM TAKING ON THE BURDEN OF RUNNING THE GOVERNMENT FOR AN ADDITIONAL TERM.

4. GAYOOM NOMINATED

A SPECIAL SESSION OF THE MAJLIS WAS THEREFORE CONVENED ON JUNE 16, 1978 TO NOMINATE ANOTHER CANDIDATE. THE THREE FRONT RUNNERS FOR NOMINATION WERE: MINISTER OF HEALTH, (MRS.) MOOMINA A. ISMAIL; MINISTER OF EDUCATION, AMIR ABDUL SATTAR; AND MINISTER OF TRANSPORT, MAUMOON ABDUL GAYOOM. THE MAJLIS NOMINATED FORTY-TWO YEAR OLD MAUMOON ABDUL GAYOOM, MINISTER OF TRANSPORT, AS THE NEXT CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES.

5. POPULAR ELECTION NEXT STEP

ON SEPTEMBER 11, 1978, A NATIONAL REFERENDUM WILL BE HELD IN WHICH GAYOOM MUST SECURE A MAJORITY OF THE VOTES. IF ELECTED, GAYOOM WOULD ASSUME POWER ON NOVEMBER 11, 1978. IF GAYOOM IS NOT ELECTED BY A MAJORITY, THE MAJLIS MUST ONCE AGAIN MEET IN SPECIAL SESSION TO PROPOSE ANOTHER CANDIDATE. THE SEPTEMBER REFERENDUM MAY ELECT GAYOOM TO THE PRESIDENCY. HOWEVER, THERE HAVE BEEN CRITICISMS VOICED OVER THE CHOICE OF THE MAJLIS. A CAMBRIDGE GRADUATE, GAYOOM HAS SPENT A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF TIME IN RECENT YEARS OUT OF THE MALDIVES, MUCH OF IT IN EGYPT AND LIBYA. IN THIS TRADITIONAL MUSLIM SOCIETY, THERE ARE THOSE WHO ARE SUSPICIOUS OF PERSONS WHO HAVE SPENT A LOT OF TIME ABROAD EXPOSED TO FOREIGN INFLUENCES. ALSO, SOME MALJIS

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DIVIANS CONSIDER GAYOOM, AT FORTY-TWO, TOO YOUNG FOR THE PRESIDENCY.

6. SIGNIFICANCE OF ELECTION

IF GAYOOM IS ELECTED, THE RISE OF THIS YOUNG FOREIGN EDUCATED MINISTER TO A POSITION WHICH HAS BEEN HELD BY ONE MAN FOR THE PAST TEN YEARS RAISES THE POSSIBILITY OF CHANGE IN THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES. SPECULATION INCLUDES RESIGNATIONS OF OLDER OFFICIALS WHO HAVE BEEN WITH PRESIDENT NASIR THROUGHOUT HIS TENURE AND FORM THE TRADITIONAL BLOC OF GOVERNMENT LEADERS. THESE VACANCIES WOULD MOST LIKELY BE FILLED BY YOUNGER, FOREIGN EDUCATED OFFICIALS WHO NOW CONDUCT MUCH OF THE BUSINESS OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

7. CAUTIONARY NOTE - NASIR REMAINS POWERFUL

IF GAYOOM IS ELECTED, THE GOVERNMENT OF THE MALDIVES COULD RETURN TO A SYSTEM OF PRIME MINISTER RULE. ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT NASIR PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED HIS DECISION TO RETIRE FROM THE PRESIDENCY, WE ASSUME THAT HE COULD BE PERSUADED TO TAKE THE ROLE OF PRIME MINISTER. SHOULD GAYOOM NOT GAIN A MAJORITY IN THE NATIONAL REFERENDUM, PRESIDENT NASIR COULD ALSO ALLOW THE MAJLIS

TO SUBMIT HIS NAME AS A CANDIDATE FOR "THE GOOD OF THE COUNTRY",
AND WE BELIEVE HE WOULD NOT REFUSE TO SERVE. HOWEVER,
NASIR'S REFERENCE TO ILL HEALTH IN HIS LETTER TO THE MAJLIS IS
GENUINE. HE PERIODICALLY TRANSITS COLOMBO ENROUTE TO SINGAPORE
FOR TREATMENT OF A MALFUNCTIONING KIDNEY.
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